



## **The Florida House of Representatives**

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### **Florida House Speaker Dean Cannon's Opening Day Remarks as Prepared for Delivery**

I am pleased to see so many familiar faces here with us today. One of my goals as Speaker has been to make adjustments to this process to stem the loss of institutional memory that accompanies term limits. But no program or training the House can devise can match what you can learn from our former Speakers and our former Leaders. And, I want to thank you all for your legacy of leadership and example to us.

I would like to extend my personal welcome to all of our guests here today – whether you are on the Floor or joining us in the gallery. To the families of our Members, I want to extend a special thank you. No one truly understands the sacrifice of public service in the Florida House and the burdens it places on our families. The love and support you give to the Members is what makes it possible for them to lead this great state.

And so Members, I would ask that we rise and show our appreciation for our spouses, our children, our parents, our siblings, and all of those who enable us to serve here.

Standing up here on Opening Day brings back so many memories especially of my freshman term. During my first two years in the House, I had the privilege to serve with a Republican governor who led this state as a principled conservative; who believed in transformational reform, and who believed that standing up for what is right mattered more than being popular.

And now, as I begin my final two years in the House, I am privileged to again serve with a Republican governor who leads this state as a principled conservative, and who believes that standing up for what is right matters more than being popular.

166 year ago, Florida became the 27<sup>th</sup> State to join the United States of America. Since then, our State's Legislature has assembled to address the great issues of the day. In some years, those

issues were unique to Florida. At other times, like today, those issues were a subset of a much larger national conversation.

The challenges we will address over the next 60 days are very similar to issues being addressed in state capitols from Hartford to Honolulu. The nationalization of state politics has emerged as a result of the crisis that has consumed Washington D.C. It is to state the obvious to say that the Federal government has failed to meet its responsibilities.

The political system in Washington D.C. is broken. It has spawned a massive, unwieldy bureaucracy that looks at states as if they are administrative subsidiaries rather than as sovereign entities within a Federal system of government.

It has created a paralyzing web of entitlement programs that is literally beginning to collapse under the weight of promises it cannot fulfill. It has avoided dealing with these problems by spending money we don't have and borrowing money we have no way to repay. Washington has become addicted to foreign debt. We are like a fiscal heroin addict and the Chinese government is their main supplier. Throughout all of this, politicians in both parties have failed to do anything to stop it.

All of that on its own is disturbing, but in a Federal system of government, what happens at one level of government inevitably translates to the other layers of government.

And so a state like Florida – where we've maintained a responsible, balanced budget; where we've avoided significantly expanding existing entitlement programs; a state which in the last 16 years has pushed through a number of policy reforms – still faces the most significant fiscal crisis in our modern history.

Although the idea of a Federal system of government implies a division between the Federal government and the states, the truth is that we have become increasingly dependent on Federal money in the areas of health care, social services, transportation, the environment, and education.

This week the House will take up a bill dealing with unemployment compensation, where the State has been forced to act as the administrator for a mandatory Federal program.

Later in Session, we will take up a bill dealing with Medicaid, a Great Society Federal entitlement program run amok and it has become the single largest cost driver in our state's budget.

But as we consider the challenges posed by these national issues and national policies, we should be careful to avoid drawing the wrong conclusions. The Federal government is not broken because the men and women of Congress are bad or selfish people.

I believe that most of them went to Congress with the same good intent that brings each of us to Tallahassee. Each went to Washington believing that they were going to be the catalyst for change – they were going to be the person to make the difference.

But along the way, something went wrong. They got sidetracked by a culture of corruption or intoxicated by an environment of entitlement. Popularity – with voters, with political commentators, with special interest groups – became the goal.

They measured the merits of their ideas by poll numbers and the success of their initiatives by the number of minutes they spent on CNN or Fox News. They chased political trends and curried favor with special interests.

They forgot that social services should lift people out of hard times not surround them in a cocoon of dependency. They forgot that when governments step in to protect certain types of businesses then markets are no longer free.

In their desire to not upset special interests, they learned they could avoid hard truths with creative accounting and convoluted adjustments to their balance sheet. In their desire to pass a law to solve every problem – which is so tempting – they shrugged off the constitutional restraints on their power and traded liberty for government control and statesmanship for sound bites.

Why is all of that so important? Because if we are not vigilant, we will follow Washington down the path they have created with their good intentions and their lousy decisions.

We too have become enamored with the politics of labels. We find a catchy name for a concept and suddenly the details, the actual law, becomes secondary. The packaging begins to define the content – eight is enough, the anti-murder act, three strikes and you're out – at the end of the day we must have more than a slogan.

In lawmaking, details matter, and it is fine for a slogan or a label to start the conversation, but we the lawmakers have to finish it, carefully. We have to care about the details and the real impact of what we do.

This Session, we will be faced with the temptation to which our colleagues in Washington have already given in – the desire to put off hard decisions. There will be lobbyists and others promising easy ways to do hard things. Fantasies and phantom budget solutions will be traveling the hallways in the guise of waivers and efficiencies.

We will be tempted to balance our budget by reaching up to the Federal government to bail us out or by pushing down our burdens to local governments.

As we move forward to put together the 2011-12 budget, I would ask all of you to recall this basic truth – you cannot cut government spending without cutting government services.

This Session, in this House, we will be responsible for our own actions.

This Session, in this House, we are going to strive to do something that many say is impossible – to conduct ourselves in a manner that restores the trust and the confidence of the people of

Florida in their government, and to implement reforms that will transcend the bounds of process, politics and political parties.

I reject the notion that people are unavoidably cynical about politics. Americans believe in a better system.

In the Speaker's Office, we've displayed documents that symbolize our nation's pursuit of freedom and our desire to build a better nation and a better world. We are a country that confronts our problems and learns from our mistakes. We are a country that believes in our ability to form and constantly pursue better government, to form a more perfect union.

Floridians have always been the most optimistic of Americans. Ours is the Sunshine State – a place populated by people seeking a new and better life.

But our predecessors understood, and we must remember, that this new and better life does not come easily or without sacrifice. Neither the future, nor anything in it is an entitlement; the future it must be fought for and it must be earned.

This Session, in this House, we will show the people of Florida that we are willing to do what is necessary to produce a responsible balanced budget. We will use real numbers and hard data – even if those numbers tell us things we do not want to hear. We will remember that a catchy label doesn't make a bad idea good.

This Session, in this House, we will show the people of Florida that we can see past political self-interest and address the problems that matter to the future of our State. These are difficult times, and that means we will make difficult decisions. We will have to reduce spending on good programs in order to preserve necessary programs.

We will have to make hard choices, and those choices will not occur in a vacuum. Over the next nine weeks, this Capitol will be filled with angry protesters, countless special interests, and well-paid lobbyists. And all are welcome. In a free society, everyone – friend or foe – has the opportunity to participate in the process and have their voices heard. Unfortunately, many of those protestors and interest groups and lobbyists will attempt to manipulate the emotions of our citizens in an effort to influence all of us.

To those groups I say this: this Session, in this House, we will not make decisions based on the politics of fear or anger.

And to our citizens, I say this: this Session, in this House, we will respect the basic tenet of this country – that our laws should favor those who are willing to work hard and play by the rules.

This Session, in this House, we will continue our journey to toward an education system built on the unassailable truth that our public schools exist to ensure that our students learn.

We have made significant strides in the area of student performance and school accountability, and now we will translate that concept to the area of teacher quality. We cannot and will not

perpetuate a status quo where our worst performing teachers are paid as much as and valued as much as our hardest working, most dedicated teachers.

This Session, in this House, we will pursue policies to create a business climate that encourages entrepreneurship and remembers that private risk taking, not government incentive programs, create jobs.

The primary engines of Florida's economy, the incubators of innovation in the marketplace, and the true key to reducing unemployment, are our small businesses. That is where we should focus our attention and our resources.

This Session, in this House, we will finally deal with a Medicaid program that spreads like a cancer, each year consuming more and more of the State budget.

We will pass meaningful, comprehensive Medicaid reform that does not cater to any of the entrenched interests but instead holds them all to account.

I will be the first to admit that our Medicaid plan is not easily reduced to a sound bite. It is a complex bill designed to solve a complicated problem. It is tough, fair, comprehensive and realistic.

It recognizes that the time for special interest carve outs and pilot programs has passed.

If we allow ourselves to become distracted by symbolism, slogans, or empty threats, we will end up simply pushing the problem on to a future Legislature to solve. Instead, we have to try to do what Washington has failed to do – step up to the plate and bring this entitlement program under control.

This Session, in this House, if we decide that government should act, we should act decisively, regardless of whether that action upsets entrenched interests. Florida has become the national supplier for the prescription drug abuse.

Florida pill mills sell medications directly to the patient rather than giving them a prescription to take to a legitimate pharmacy.

Nearly half of all doctors in the country who buy and dispense methadone are located in Florida and they purchase more than 93% of all the methadone sold to practitioners in the entire country.

The supply of oxycodone purchased by practitioners is also frightening. Florida has 5% of the population, yet doctors dispense 85% of the oxycodone sold and dispensed by practitioners in the entire country.

Physicians bought enough oxycodone to dispense 100 times the amount per Florida resident than supplied by practitioners in the rest of the country, combined.

Those statistics tell a clear and unambiguous story – there are a group of doctors in Florida who have abandoned the principles and ethics of their noble profession in order to become drug dealers.

They deserve neither the protection nor sanction of this State nor of their own profession, which is why the Florida House will propose legislation banning the direct sale to patients of oxycodone, hydromorphone, hydrocodone and methadone by these drug dealing doctors.

We must look beyond awkward regulations and downstream databases and send a message to the drug dealers and the drug seekers that, when it comes to the pill mill industry, Florida is now closed for business.

This Session, in this House, we will address the modernization of our courts system. Despite what you might have read in the newspaper, I believe strongly in our judiciary.

Our courts are the guardians of our basic rights and essential liberties. But, when any branch of government acts to deprive a person of their life, their liberty or their property, those government actions should be subjected to the strictest of scrutiny, and handled with the great care.

By creating a Supreme Court of Criminal Appeals and a Supreme Court of Civil Appeals, we can expand the capacity of the existing court and provide specialization that will result in greater scrutiny and better justice in criminal cases, especially death penalty cases.

An important part of court reform will also be ensuring our State's judges have the financial resources they will need to perform their duties.

At the same time, we should modernize the processes associated with the development of court rules and with the appointment, selection and retention of judges.

I believe very strongly in the independence of the judiciary, and I won't support any proposals that undermine our courts. However, judicial independence should never be offered as an excuse to escape accountability, or the limits of our constitution.

Because we are a constitutional republic, each branch of government has its role to play. Each branch of government has its privileges and its rights. And each branch of government has its limits.

In addition to being one of my favorite presidents, Abraham Lincoln is also one of my favorite writers.

In his Gettysburg Address President Lincoln noted that "the world will little note nor long remember what we say here," and I certainly believe that sentiment holds true for my remarks today, and for the speeches and debate that will follow in the next 60 days.

But, I am equally sure that while our names and our words will be lost to the pages of history, the people of Florida will long remember and be affected by what we do, or fail to do here.

Standing before you today, I am filled with optimism and hope that the light of opportunity and the blessing of Providence will continue to shine on Florida's future.

The next 60 days will be among the most challenging any of us have faced. How we respond to those challenges will determine and define the shape of things to come in our great State.

This Session, in this House, we have an opportunity to defy expectations.

We can refuse to follow our national leaders over the edge and into the abyss. We can prove to the people of Florida that we have the wisdom to know what is right and the courage to do what is right.

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